

GREAT PARDON FOR GREAT SIN

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“For thy name’s sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.”
Psalm 25:11

THIS striking prayer is hemmed in, as it were, between two promises. It looks like a fossil embedded in a mass of stone. What it means it there? Why is it put in such a peculiar position? The psalmist is both praising and preaching, how is it that he turns to praying? Beloved, I think it was to teach us that prayer is never out of place.

When the apostle Paul was writing the most doctrinal of his epistles, he sometimes paused in the midst of them to offer a supplication, as when he said, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When engaged in any holy duties, you may even refrain from praise for a moment in order to present a prayer to God. Nor would it be amiss for us sometimes to break the thread of a sermon, that the people might pause, and join with the preacher in asking God’s blessing upon the message of mercy, and upon all who hear it. Certainly, my dear friends, you will never find any time inopportune for prayer if your heart be true and your faith in full force.

The Mohammedans have their fixed hours for prayer and when they hear the signal from the minaret of the mosque, wherever they may be, in the street or in the market place, they bow their heads to Allah and repeat their form of prayer. Without their boastful showiness, you may “pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”

We need not be confined to special seasons when a summons is given, but at all times and in every place, we may “continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” When your hands are measuring out your goods, when they are pushing the plow, or driving the nail, when you are driving the plow, or threshing the corn, if you are speeding along the iron way, or walking among the cornfields, your heart may have fellowship with Him—

*“Who is within no walls confined,
But habits the humble mind,”—*

who counts all places holy where men are holy, and all spots suitable places for prayer when the heart is in a prayerful frame. My Soul, wait thou upon God in your daily calling, and think not that thou canst ever approach Him at an unseasonable hour, or lift up thy cry to Him when He is otherwise engaged, so that He cannot attend to thy petition.

Were it necessary to my present purpose to explain the connection of this prayer with the scope of the psalm, it would not be difficult. The promise that the psalmist had just recited is “unto such as keep his covenant.” It was the besetting sin of Israel to break the covenant. Do you not see that the condition here mentioned would shut the door of hope to many? The greatness of the promise often stirs up our deepest anxieties, lest any of us should seem to come short of it. Depend upon it, brethren, that the prayer for pardon, which is never unfitting at any time, can never be more fitting than when our hearts are lifted up with the loftiest apprehension of God’s covenant.

My principal aim however, tonight, is to bring my hearers and myself, all of us, to feel with David that our iniquity is great. When I have done this, I shall very briefly try to show how the very greatness

of our iniquity may become a plea with God, "Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great." And I shall close with some earnest entreaties to those who have never sought pardon for sin to seek it now.

I. Well then, first, DAVID DECLARED THAT HIS INIQUITY WAS GREAT.

The word used in the original conveys the idea of quantity as well as of quality. Not simply was his sin great in its atrocity, but there was very much of it, any one sin was great, but it was not merely one, but ten thousand times ten thousand in multitude. His sin was as great in its bulk as it was black in its heinousness.

Now, I do not know, although David had one very terrible fall, that any humble-minded person here would consider himself to be superior to David. He was a man after God's own heart, and notwithstanding the great blot upon this sun, we would not hesitate to say he is a sun for all that. For David presents a character so admirable, so all but matchless in the harmony of the different graces, that we think he certainly approaches very near to his great Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Certainly, if David felt his iniquity to be great, it would be very foul presumption in any of us to think ours to be little. At any rate, we must come out one by one, and say, "I reckon myself to be a better man than David was," or else we ought to subscribe heartily with our hand to the truth that our iniquity must be great too if David's was.

But leaving David out of the question, not comparing ourselves with others, we will draw some few pictures by which the greatness of our iniquity may be seen. Our sin is great *when we consider against whom it is committed*. In an army, if a soldier shall strike his comrade, it is, of course, a misdemeanor, but if he should have smitten some petty officer, it is considered to be a more grievous offense, and if he should have struck the commander-in-chief, it would become so great a crime that I know not what penalty short of death might be awarded to it.

Now, in the world of morals, as God sees it, there is much difference in sin when we consider the difference in the person against whom it is committed. You and I think it is the worst sin that hurts us the most.

We have heard, I daresay, the story of the lawyer who was waited upon by a farmer, who asked him what would be the penalty for a man whose horse was always going into his neighbor's field and eating his corn, he had warned him several times, and told him it was the result of his broken fence which he ought to have mended. The lawyer said, "Of course, there would be a considerable fine, no doubt." "Well, sir," said he, "it is your horse that has done this." "Oh!" said our friend the solicitor, "that is quite a different question, I did not know it was my horse before I gave my opinion."

So it is, generally, with regard to anything that is done amiss, if it hurts you, or if it hurts me, we feel very indignant about it, but if it only offends the Majesty of heaven, we make light of it. What fools we are! If it shall offend such puny, insignificant creatures as we are, there is something seriously wrong in it, but if the divine Majesty be insulted, we pass it by as though it were a mere trifle.

There really is a difference in the sin according to the person against whom it is committed. I will put it thus. A man has just now been striking another, striking him with an intent to do him hurt. "That is bad," say you. "Yes, but it was his own father that he struck." "Ay," now you say, "that is far worse for him to have injured the man whom he ought to have loved and honored."

So, since God is our Creator, any attack that is made upon His government, any willful violation of His law is aggravated by the fact that we owe to Him such unfounded allegiance. "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture."

Sinners, did you ever think of this? You have offended Him who made you, in whose hand your breath is, and under whose control are all your ways. When you have used profane words, it has been against the High and Lofty One, against JEHOVAH, who rides upon the sky, and launches abroad His thunderbolts, and shakes heaven and earth with His terrible voice, against Him, before whom the holy angels veil their faces, and humbly bow themselves, unworthy to lick the dust of His feet, it is against God that you have offended. Sinner, you think this is a little matter, but I tell you that it is this fact that makes your iniquity great.

Yet further, sin derives some degree of its sinfulness *from the fact that it is at once against a most just and equitable law*. We sometimes read in the newspapers, that persons are severely punished for offenses against the game laws of our country. Well, I suppose it is a very wicked thing to shoot another person's hares and pheasants and partridges. Were I a preserver of game, I daresay I would consider the offense of the tenant farmer who shot a bird that was feeding on his corn, to be very aggravated. As I am not, I do not particularly see its flagrant character. No doubt it is wrong, though it looks to me more like a misdemeanor than a felony.

When a law is proved to be harsh and severe, there will always be some mitigation in our judgment of the culpability of breaking it. If we consider such and such a law hard and tyrannical, not suited to the times, and out of keeping with the age, then we say, when a person breaks it, "Well, he had better not have done it, it is an offense against statute law, and he ought not to have committed it," still, we do not think it to be so black as when the offense is against a just, equitable, proper, and righteous law, which harmonizes with strict, unvarying equity. Now, such is the law of God.

What can be more fitting than the law of the ten commandments? Infidelity itself has turned pale before those ten commandments. We have heard of men who have attempted to improve the law of God by a new commandment, and have found themselves unable to do it, for they perceived it to be so complete that it embraced all forms of criminality. Those who have abhorred other parts of Scripture have said, as they read the ten precepts, "These are just and righteous." They are, indeed, the fundamental stones of natural morality, they are such as even nature, itself, would approve to be right and proper for the government of the world.

Well then, sirs, if you have broken these good commandments, if you have run your head against these holy, just, and righteous precepts, your iniquity is great. If you could turn to any law of God, and say, "This is harsh, this is tyrannical," there might be some excuse for you, but those commandments were made for your good. If you keep them, they will bring you their own reward, if you break them, they will bring their own penalty into your body, and mind, and heart. Wherefore, then, have you been so foolish as to violate them? Assuredly, in so doing, your iniquity has become heavy as a millstone, and if it be about your neck when you come to die, it will sink you in the floods forever.

But dear friends, we ought each of us to remember that *our sin is all the greater because it has been committed by us*, for sometimes an offense is all the worse because of the person who has committed it. When the noble Caesar saw Brutus stab him, he said, "And thou, Brutus!" There was force in his dying words, for Brutus had been his dear friend, one who owed no little to him, and surely, the Lord might say to us, when we sin, "And you too, and you! You whom I have fed day by day, you who are clothed by My charity, and nourished by My bounty! You! living in this fair province of the universe which is called the world, this beautiful fair round green earth! You—partakers of such innumerable favors—you sin against Me?"

Ah, Christians, you who are heaven's favorites, you who are allowed to enter into the Lord's cabinet councils, and to understand the secrets of His covenant, you who are Christ's own spouse, the bride of the Prince of heaven, your sin is all the blacker because of that light of His countenance in which it has been your privilege to walk!

But to hasten on, as I throw off these hints to be worked out in your own minds rather than to be dwelt upon in my discourse, let me remind you again that *our sin is certainly very great because of the amount of it*. Innumerable times have we transgressed. It is not as though we had done wrong once, and then washed our hands of it. Who can count his errors? What man can tell the number of the small dust of his transgressions?

As for the drops of dew twinkling in the morning light, as for the drops of the ocean making that vast flood, as for the stars of heaven, and the sand of the seashore—the incalculable number of all these sinks into insignificance when compared with the infinite host of our transgressions against Thee, O God of heaven and earth!

This very day, have there not been more sins than moments, more transgressions than heartbeats, more offenses than pulses? God only knows the total of the sins of man. Only His infinite mind can reckon the iniquity that crops forth from the polluted soil, and wells up from the deep spring of depravity that is hidden in the very core of our corrupt nature. Count your sins if you can, O you children of God, and then fall on your knees, bow your heads, cover your faces, and say, “Our iniquity is indeed great.”

Nor is this all, we ought also to remember that *we have sinned and offended without any provocation*. When a poor wretch, pinched with hunger, snatches a loaf from a bake shop and eats it ravenously in the street, what magistrate could forbear to treat him leniently? But when a rascal does a wanton mischief without cause, or commits a willful robbery without conscience, what defense can he set up? With such utter defiance of law and order, we have no patience and we say, “Let the full punishment fall upon his guilty head.”

And that is what you and I have done, we have sinned for sinning’s sake. When we spent our money in sin, it was for that which is not bread, and our labor of iniquity was for that which did not profit us. You and I have not been gainers by all that we have done amiss. There may have been times when you had the excuse of getting something by sin, but not always.

For instance, what excuse is there for swearing? Lust may plead a pleasure, wine may ease a pain, avarice has an eye to gain, but the cheap swearer, from his open sluice, lets his soul run out in sorry curses, losing all the patience he possesses for the mere sake of venting forth black and ugly words that have no meaning. This is infamous, what if I say it is infernal to sin for the mere sake of sinning?

We heard of one the other day, who said when reprov’d for cursing, that he would continue to swear, yea, if he had an angel on each shoulder, he would still go on cursing. There seem to be some of this sort who, for the mere sake of dabbling in the mire, will do it, and in truth, we have all in our time, sinned in open defiance of the Almighty, and therefore our iniquity is heavy.

Sons of men, I put it to you, as one of yourselves, and therefore, willing to be your advocate—but I must rather take up the cause of Him against whom we have offended—what has He ever done to us that we should hate Him? He has made us, fed us, clothed us, for which of these good works do we forget Him? He has sent His Son to redeem His people, is this a cause why we should despise Him? He follows us day after day with invitations of mercy, stirs up our consciences, hedges up the road to hell as though He would not let us perish, for which of these things do we requite Him with evil?

What has the Most High done to provoke you? Has He ever done you a displeasure? In what respect has He thwarted you except for your good? What pleasure that is a real pleasure has He denied you? Is His yoke heavy? Is His burden intolerable? Are His commandments like the whips of Solomon, or His laws like the scorpion of Rehoboam? Has He made His little finger thicker than the wires of human law? Do you not know that men, in superstition, will make laws ten times harder than God’s laws ever were, and will keep them too?

It cannot, therefore, be that God has thus offended you. O wherefore then, sons of men, do we despise our God? What can there be so good in sin that we *will* have it, and God’s anger with it? What can there be so sweet in hell that we choose it, and despise the glories of heaven? Verily, in this arrant folly, this flagrant malice, this frantic madness, our iniquity is great indeed.

Yet further, what if I should say that *we have gone on in sin after we have, some of us, known and felt the evil of it?* I speak advisedly when I appeal to almost all of you now present and ask—must not your iniquity be great because it was not done in ignorance? Many here were nursed in the lap of godliness, your sins, therefore, are ten times heavier than other men’s. The lamp of the sanctuary lit some of us to our cradles. The hush of lullaby had the name of Jesus mingled with it.

Perhaps the first song we learned to sing was concerning the children’s best Friend. The first book that we began to read contained His sweet name, and many were the times when we were pressed by godly ones to think of Jesus, and to give our young hearts to Him. But we put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, darkness for light, and light for darkness, and knowing the good from the evil, we did willfully

choose to do that which is wrong. Ah, for this thing, when we have sinned against light and knowledge, does not our transgression become greater than that of the people of Tyre and Sidon who perished in their sin?

And then, when we had learned by experience, as well as by education, that sin was bitter, we went on in it still. There is a young man yonder who went astray once and smarted for it, and he thought he would never be such a fool again. But it has happened to him according to the true proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Some men seem only to get out of one ditch to roll into another.

There are plenty of persons who, when they put their fingers in the fire and burn them, run and get them bound up and healed, only to go to the next fire and thrust in, not their fingers this time, but their arms up to their elbows! Take care that one of these days, man, you do not have your body and soul consumed in that fire which can never be quenched.

How foolish some are who have been on the spendthrift line! After they have emptied their pockets and found themselves beggars, they have gone to their friends who used to take a glass with them—such jolly companions, such dear friends as they used to be, but they do not know them now. "Oh, no!" they say, and give them the cold shoulder, now that their clothes begin to look a little out at elbows.

I have seen these people get employment again and throw themselves out of it by their ill character. I have seen them get a respectable situation perhaps two or three times, and then go and ruin themselves over again, and expect their friends to set them up once more—set them up on purpose that they may have the pleasure of tumbling down. When men do this so many times, certainly their iniquity becomes heavy.

I have put the case strongly concerning one or two delinquents, they are, however, only representatives of us all, for when we have smarted for an offense, we have committed it again. Burnt children are afraid of the fire, but burnt sinners are not, they will go to the fire again, like the moth which gets to the candle, singes her wings and flies off a little, but she must needs go again, and if you lift her out of the melted grease around the light, she will fly back again the first opportunity she gets, as if she thought it her ambition and her life's best glory, to be consumed in the fire. Iniquity is great indeed when it is committed against experience. Men deliberately run upon the pikes of damnation, they destroy their own souls by a sort of spiritual suicide.

At times, men's offenses to their fellow men lose some of their guiltiness by an apology. Why, sometimes, when we have been aggrieved by some little offense and a proper apology has been promptly made, we could have wished we had never taken notice of it, for we did not like to see the good man so sorry about it. We freely forgave him, and felt as if we did not need him even to feel that he had done wrong, because he took it too much to heart, so we passed over the offense because of the repentance.

But how great is the guilt of that man who, having sinned, refuses to repent! And is not this exactly the case of many here present—sinning from your cradles, but never repenting? Repentance is hidden from your eyes, you go on from bad to worse, from dark to deeper stains. The Ethiopian has not changed his skin, nor the leopard his spots. You have sought no physician for your healing. You have let the deadly gangrene grow yet more putrid, until the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint.

Careless sinner, I would that I could play the part of Mr. John Bunyan's Captain Boanerges and his ensign, Mr. Thunder, and run up the black colors before your eye, bearing as the escutcheon the flaming thunderbolts of God's justice.

You who will not repent must incur the fierce wrath of God. Lo! He has bent His bow and made it ready, He has fitted His arrow to the string, He takes aim tonight at you, the arrow shall soon fly and reach your heart. Oh, that you had grace given you to repent! O Spirit of God, break the sinner's heart! Take hold of Your great hammer with which You do cleave mountains, and dash that heart in pieces, that the sinner may cry out, "Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great."

With some men, their iniquity becomes all the greater because *they have sinned against promises which they have made, vows which have been registered in heaven, and covenants which they have signed with the Most High*. You know who I mean. You were ill with the fever some few years ago, you were given up, you turned your face to the wall, and you remember how, in the bitterness of your soul, you cried, “O God, if you will but spare me, mine shall be another and a better life for the future!” You were spared, but your life has been worse rather than better.

You remember too, when the cholera was abroad, and there were many falling on the right hand and on the left, you were terrified and alarmed, and you sought God after a sort and told Him that if He would but spare your life, that life would be spent in His service. What have you been doing since then? It is true that you sometimes go to the house of God, but it is only in the evening, when you have made your money in the morning, you do not mind giving God the fag end of Sunday.

The first two or three weeks after you got better, the shutters were up, there was no rioting, no swearing, no loose conversation, your neighbors said, “What has come over the fellow? He is quite a different man.” Yes, you had another heart for the time, but not a new heart, and now you are as reckless as ever.

Do you think God has forgotten your promises? Do you think that registered covenant of yours has been blotted out? No, sinner, no, it stands fast against you to make your guilt more infamous, and your transgressions more heavy. Take heed! Take heed! Take heed! When God shall hold it up against you, at the last tremendous day, you will read your doom in that broken promise, in that lie which has been uttered against the God of grace and goodness.

Most of us, at some time or other, have sinned thus against resolutions and promises, and consequently, our iniquities are heavy. O dear friends, I have a task too hard for me in such a subject as this! When I talk of the glories of the love of Christ, I feel at home, when I speak of the matchless grace of the everlasting covenant, my heart is well at ease, but to prove man’s sin heavy, is a task too hard for me. Not that it is hard in itself. The evidence is clear, but to procure a conviction is the difficulty. The jury is not impartial. Your conscience is like an unjust judge.

Oh, how hard it is to make any man believe himself to be so bad as the Word of God says he is! None but the Spirit of God can make a man call himself a sinner and mean it. Nothing but the irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit can ever bring a man as low as the Word of God would have him lie. If you can feel, in your soul tonight, that your iniquity is great, that it deserves God’s wrath, displeasure and punishment—if you do pray from your very heart, “O Lord, pardon thou mine iniquity, for it is great”—I shall have hope of you that the first sparks of the divine light have fallen into your soul, never to be quenched, but to blaze out in the brightness of salvation forever.

II. I shall now turn, very briefly, to the second part of my subject, to show how THERE IS A PLEA IN THE VERY GREATNESS OF OUR SIN.

Is not this a very strange text, think you? Look at it again, one needs to read it over twenty times. Is it really so written? “Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great!” Can you believe your own eyes? Imagine a prisoner at the Old Bailey pleading with the judge that he would kindly let him off because he was such a great offender, we should think that it would be a very legitimate reason why he should not be pardoned. The pith, however, of the whole text lies in those words which we sometimes forget to quote, “For thy name’s sake.” That alters it. It is an argument now, it was not before, “For thy name’s sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.”

Let me show you that there is a plea here. If salvation were by merit, then, supposing all men to have fallen, and none of them to have any merit, yet it would be a rule that the man who was the least offender should have the first turn at being saved. If the choice of God depended in any way upon man’s condition, we would naturally expect that the man who had the least sin would be forgiven first, for putting all on an equal basis in all other respects, the choice, if made at all, with reference to the man, would naturally be the choice of the man who had committed the least iniquity.

But dear friends, please to remember that in the covenant of Christ, and the way of salvation, the choice is made upon reverse principles, not according to man's merit, but according to God's glory. The aim, end, and objective of God, in salvation is to glorify His own character, hence, if His choice may be said to be guided by any principles which we can at all understand, that choice would be guided to select those who would the most magnify His grace, and glorify His own name. Well now, if God would do that great work of pardoning sin in such a way as to glorify His own name, the most fitting persons to be saved are the biggest sinners.

Let me put it thus. Here is a number of persons, and they are all sick, and here is a physician who intends to get to himself a name. He is full of benevolence and kindness, but at the same time, one part of his objective is to get a name. Now, you will perceive that in the selection of his patients, he will not pick out a man there who has a sore finger, for it will never tell very much to his credit that he healed a man who had a sore finger, but there will be perhaps, a few cases among the sick of a very extraordinary sort. Some of them will have an affliction, a disease quite unknown hitherto to the faculty. Medicines have been tried, but their cases have been so stubborn that the best doctors have given them up as hopeless.

Now, the physician says, "These are the cases that I will select." Granting that he is able to cure whomsoever he wills, you can see that if the objective be his own glory, he would rather take those in which there is the most room for the display of the healing art than those who have the least sickness, and might be the most readily cured.

Yet again, suppose a man means to have a character for generosity. There are a number of debtors assembled, and he is determined to discharge their liabilities. There is a man who owes sixpence, and another who owes a pound. Well now, if he pays their debts, he will never have much credit for liberality there, but another man comes in who is over head and ears in debt. What is the sum he owes? Fifty thousand pounds, let us say a hundred thousand pounds, let us say half a million. Well now, here is the opportunity for the liberal man to display his liberality because here there is room for it.

So is it in grace. You, proud Pharisee, come to God and say, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men," and He replies, "Then there is no room in you for My grace to work." But yonder poor publican dares not lift so much as his eyes towards heaven, but smites upon his breast and cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "There is a case for Me," saith sovereign mercy, and the pardon comes to the poor sinful publican.

Mark, when I speak of sinners, I do not mean merely those who have been great sinners, or those who have been, in comparison with others, little sinners, but I mean those who feel themselves to be great sinners. I say, the more we feel our guilt, the more fit we are for mercy, the more broken down we are with hopelessness on account of our own lost estate, the more room there is for the triumphs of Christ's grace.

Now, there is many a moral man here tonight who never offended against the laws of his land, or the laws of outward propriety, yet he feels himself to be as black as hell. Well then, there is room in him for grace to glorify itself. We have noticed that men of the worst character are often the most self-righteous. There is many a Pharisee whose morals would not pass muster, though he vaunts his piety as a harlot flaunts her broidery, and many a scamp who would be a disgrace to the meanest society if his character were known, brazens it out as though he never had offended against a single law of God.

Again, I say you who feel that you are the very chief of sinners, you who groan and mourn on account of sin, be not silenced at the mercy seat because of the greatness of your guilt, but rather, with the inimitable skill of the Syrophenician woman, turn the very desperateness of your case into a reason why the Lord should save you.

Now tonight, upon your knees, wrestle with the God of mercy, and say, "Pardon me, for my transgression is great, and my hell will be great. But if You will save me, Your honor will be great, if You will redeem me, the power of Your blood will be great, if You will give me a new heart the transforming power of Your Spirit will be great. O God, save me! God be merciful to me a sinner."

This is, as Luther says, to cut off the devil's head with his own sword. When the devil says to you, "You are a sinner," say to him, "I am, and Christ died to save sinners." And when he says, "But you are a big sinner, you are a Jerusalem sinner, a bigger sinner than any other," say to him, "Yes, that is true, but Jesus said 'that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'"

I have tried, and I am trying, to preach a wide Gospel, I do not like to have a net with such big meshes that the fish get through. I think I may catch you all if the Lord wills. If the vilest are not shut out, then you are not shut out friends, and if you believe in Christ with all your heart, you shall be saved.

But oh, what if you should say, "I care not for forgiveness, I do not want pardon, I will not seek it, I will not have it, I love my sins, I love myself"? O sinner, then, by that death bed of yours, where you shall see your dreadful sins in another light, by that resurrection of yours where you shall see eternity to be no trifle, by that doom of yours, by the last dread thunders, by the awful sentence, "Depart, ye cursed," of the Judge, I beseech you, do me but this one favor! Own that you had an invitation tonight, and that it was affectionately pressed upon you.

I have told you, in God's name, that your sin is not a trifle with God—that it is not a matter to be laughed at or to be whistled over. I have told you that the greatness of your sin need not shut you out. What is wanted is that the Spirit of God should teach you these things in your heart. But do remember, if your ears refuse these truths, and if you reject them, we are a sweet savor unto Christ as well in them that perish as in them that are saved. But woe unto you—woe unto you, who, with the Gospel ringing in your ears, go down to the pit! "Verily, verily, I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for you." May God save you, for Jesus' sake! Amen!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ROMANS 10:1-15

Verse 1. *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.*

Let this be our "heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel." Sorrows upon sorrows have come to the Lord's ancient people even down to this day, and they have been scattered and peeled, and rent and torn in almost every land. Who does not pity their griefs and woes? Let it be our heart's desire and daily prayer for Israel that they may be saved through faith in the Messiah whom they have so long rejected.

2. *For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.*

In Paul's day, they were most diligent in the observance of every form of outward devotion, and many of them sincerely desired to be right with God, but they did not know how to attain the desired end.

3. *For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*

Perhaps I am addressing some who are very anxious to be right with God, they are by no means hypocrites, but are really awakened to a sense of their danger, yet they cannot get peace of mind, and the reason is that, like the Israelites, they are "going about to establish their own righteousness." "Going about"—that is to say, struggling, striving, searching, worrying themselves to get a righteousness of their own which they never will obtain, and being ignorant of "the righteousness of God" which is completed in Christ, and which is freely bestowed upon all who believe in Him. Alas! they "have not submitted themselves unto this righteousness of God," and there is a kind of hidden meaning in the apostle's expression. They are so proud that they will not submit to be saved by the righteousness of another, even though that other is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Yet this is the main point—the submission of our proud will to the righteousness of God.

4. *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*

Christ is the ultimatum of the law, and when we go to the law, accepted and protected by Him, we present to the law all that it can possibly demand of us. Christ has fulfilled the law on behalf of all who believe in Him, so that its curse is abolished for all of us who approach it through Christ.

5-9. *For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaks on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

“The righteousness which is of faith” is quite another thing from the righteousness which is of the law. It is not a thing of doing, and living by doing, but of trusting, and living forever by trusting. What are you at—you who would fain clamber up to the stars, or you who would plunge into the abyss? There is nothing for you to do, there is nothing for you to feel, there is nothing for you to be, in order that God may accept you, but just as you are, if you will receive Christ into your heart, and confess Him with your mouth, you shall be saved.

Oh, this glorious way of the salvation of sinners—so simple, yet so safe—so plain, yet so sublime—for me to lay aside my own righteousness, and just to take the righteousness of Christ, and be covered with it from head to foot! I may well be willing to lay aside my own righteousness, for it is a mass of filthy rags, fit only to be burned.

10-14. *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?*

How can there be true prayer where there is no faith? How shall I truly pray to God if I do not really believe in Him? “For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

14. *And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?*

We must know what it is that we are to believe, and knowing it, we shall be helped by the Holy Spirit to believe it.

14. *And how shall they hear without a preacher?*

If the Word of the Lord does not get to a man either by the living voice, or by the printing press, which often takes the preacher’s place, how is he to believe it? You see here what I have often called “the whole machinery of salvation.” First comes the preacher proclaiming the Gospel, then comes the sinner listening to it, then comes the hearer believing it, and in consequence calling upon the name of the Lord as one who is saved with His everlasting salvation.

15. *And how shall they preach, except they be sent?*

Here is the great engine at the back of all the machinery—God sending the preacher—God blessing the Word—God working faith in the heart of them that hear it.

15. *As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.